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ABSTRACT

PRINCIPALS AND UNIVERSITY CONSULTANTS ARE MOST EFFECTIVE IN WORKING WITH TEACHERS WHEN THEY ADDRESS THEMSELVES TO THE REAL CONCERNS OF TEACHERS. COLLEGE INSTRUCTORS ACCOMPLISH LITTLE BY LECTURING ON HOW TO MAXIMIZE AFFECTIVE AND COGNITIVE GROWTH WHEN STUDENTS FIRST WANT TO KNOW, "SHOULD I TEACH? WILL I BE ABLE TO CONTROL CHILDREN?" SUCH PREINSTRUCTIONAL CONCERNS MIGHT BE MET BY GIVING THEM EARLY EXPERIENCE AS TEACHER AIDES AND COUNSELING WITH REGARD TO THEIR TEACHING APTITUDE. WHEN 28 FIFTH AND EIGHTH GRADE TEACHERS IN SIX DIFFERENT SCHOOLS WERE ASKED TO DESCRIBE THE SEVERAL CHILDREN WHO PRESENTED THEIR BIGGEST PROBLEMS, BOTH ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY TEACHERS IDENTIFIED MORE BEHAVIOR PROBLEMS THAN ACADEMIC, WERE MOST CONCERNED ABOUT THE BEHAVIORAL ONES, AND CONSISTENTLY ATTRIBUTED PROBLEMS TO FACTORS OTHER THAN THEIR OWN CLASSROOM TEACHING, I.E., TO THE STUDENT'S ABILITY, ATTITUDE, OR HOME LIFE. THE STARTING POINT FOR PRINCIPALS IS NOT TO PROVIDE SUCH TEACHERS WITH "STRATEGIES" FOR MAXIMIZING STUDENT GAIN, BUT TO TALK WITH THEM ABOUT THE TOPICS THAT MOST URGENTLY CONCERN THEM, E.G., FOR BEGINNING TEACHERS, "CAN I SEND PROBLEM CHILDREN TO THE OFFICE? WHERE DO I GET HELP WITH STUDENTS WHO PRESENT SEVERE LEARNING PROBLEMS?" TEACHERS WHO RECEIVE SUCH SUPPORT WILL BECOME LESS DEFENSIVE IN EXAMINING THEIR OWN TEACHING AND MORE WILLING TO CHANGE THEIR BEHAVIOR TO FACILITATE STUDENT LEARNING. (JS)

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The music on the FM radio is beautiful. The song is one of the listener's favorite selections, but his hand quickly, furiously changes the dial and searches for the station carrying the World Series game. Nothing was wrong with the music--nothing except that the listener wanted to hear something else. Daily we strive to get the information we desire and to obtain that which is useful to our present concerns. The irrelevant and unimportant are tuned out--we switch the station.

College instructors frequently gear their instruction to issues that have no immediate relevancy for prospective teachers. Lectures often explicate and pinpoint the ways in which one may maximize the affective and cognitive growth of students, the students that these teachers-in-training will not see for another two years.

Fuller (1969) aptly demonstrated that the typical teacher candidate is not interested in how to write behavioral objectives or in grasping the itricacies of classroom research procedures. Early in their training teachers are actively interested in securing answers to such questions as, "Should I teach?" or "Will I be able to control children?" If these concerns are worked out, the teachers-in-training begin to ask: "Will I fit in with the other teachers? What will the principal and supervisors expect of me? What do others think about my teaching style? Will I be able to relate to parents in conferences?" "What type of teaching style is best for me? How can I help each student to develop himself to the fullest? How can I measure classroom learning?"

The stages teachers go through are seen roughly as hierarchical, professional development points. The term "hierarchical," in this context, suggests that until concerns at an early stage are <u>partially</u>

resolved, the individual does not have enough time and energy free to attack the problem associated with higher-order concerns. Teachers-in-training who struggle with the question "Should I teach?" feel little enthusiasm for studying about the learning needs of students whom they may never meet. Similarly, a young teacher who is caught in the grip of such concerns as "Can I control children?" expends much energy worrying about her classroom control and she often over-reacts to "threatening" student behavior. A teacher with these real and understandable fears has little time to explore such questions as: "What can I do to help Johnny become a more effective learner? What special activities would really challenge him?"

Until the teacher resolves immediate, pressing concerns she cannot address herself fully to helping students solve their problems. Unless a concern area is partially resolved, the candidate or young teacher will stay at the same level of concern. Certainly, it is possible to lecture to prospective teachers who have not resolved their pressing concerns about classroom teaching strategies, but most of the audience will tune this voice out and search for a station that speaks to their needs. Unfortunately, too often they never find this station and their needs go unmet. Principals and university consultants are most effective in working with teachers when they address themselves to the real concerns of teachers.

What are the real concerns of inservice teachers? In the fall of 1968 a special program[1] was begun in which teachers and university researchers worked together in order to plan individualized instruction to meet the learning needs of some selected children. University researchers supplied teachers with detailed information about the childrens' background and why they act as they do. They then served as a "sounding board" helping teachers to generate ideas

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[1]This was part of a larger research project, "Individualized Teaching for Effective Coping."

about how classroom activities might be modified to facilitate individual learning. In part, the study was an experiment in listening. University consultants listened to teachers and specifically paid attention to the concerns that teachers expressed. Part of what "bugs" teachers is the subject of this paper.

The sample was composed of 14 fifth-grade teachers in four different elementary schools and 14 eighth-grade teachers in two different junior high schools. Half of the teachers, the experimental group, had participated in the special research program. These teachers had worked with university consultants in analyzing and planning special learning strategies for several students in each classroom. These teachers had been interviewed several times by the consultants. The remainder of the teachers had served as "control" teachers in the study and had received only limited contact with the university consultants.

Procedures

In May, teachers were asked to respond to this question, "Identify the four or five children who present the biggest problems to you and briefly explain why the child presents a problem." Teachers were informed that a child could be a problem for any reason (e.g., the child was capable of doing better work; the child was hyperactive; etc.) The data were typed transcripts of tape-recorded interviews and, in the case of seven teachers, written answers to this question. The typed interviews and questionnaire responses were examined by an educational psychologist, a school psychologist and a clinical psychologist. The three readers rated each problem description as representing either an academic problem or a behavior problem. The percentage of agreement or problem classification among the three raters was very high. (Inter-rater reliabilities ranged from .80 to .95).

Descriptions of academic problems dealth with situations in which students couldn't learn because they didn't have the ability to do classroom work; students weren't performing as well as they

could; or teachers couldn't motivate or challenge the students. In general, the responses indicated personal behaviors and learning dispositions which affected the child himself. For example, a "poor attitude" which prevents the child from trying to do work would represent an academic problem. The following case responses illustrate academic problems.

Case #1: "There's another child from an entirely different background. He's no behavior problem, he sits the whole period. But getting him to do the work that you assign, he'd rather go back to the book and read. He reads very well. He never gets to class with paper and pencil. And you ask him if he's worked the assignment, 'No.'.... It's so difficult to give him enough written work for him to even have anything to base a grade on."

Case #2: "...She was out for about two weeks and I gave her a list of all the pages that we had studied and I told her to look over them and I'd help her as we go along, but she won't ever come after school or before school or do anything on her own. She waits until the quiz and she writes on the quiz, 'I don't know how to do this...'. And she just won't do anything on her own."

Case #3: "X is a problem academically mainly. She is a very slow student. She doesn't read well, and she doesn't comprehend well at all.... She sometimes is a discipline problem, not a severe one. You know, she's just a lot more interested in talking and playing than she is working which is understandable because she doesn't understand the work...."

Case #4: "She's a problem in that she's working probably on a high second-grade level and I teach fifth.... She still has trouble with addition and subtraction in the fifth grade and this makes division impossible. She can be a discipline problem but it's easy to understand...."

Behavior problems, of course, concern disruptive student behavior and teacher efforts to control such behaviors. An example follows.

Case #5: "...He's very smart in math but he tends to get into trouble. He's always had this tendency to try to misbehave--to see how many ways he can misbehave in. And if I can get him occupied in doing work he does real good work but I have to sit on him all the time to keep him from misbehaving, but.... The kinds of things he does are mischievious things. Taking papers from other people, you know, walking by their desks and picking up their papers while they're working on them, say walking by their desk as he goes to the pencil sharpener and making an X on their paper. Things like this that are just slightly malicious you know. And he did one thing that was unforgiveable as far as I'm concerned. I have this other boy in the same class who is very, very slow and almost what you might call stupid, I guess. I mean I hate to call anybody that but I think he qualifies. Anyway, X found this other boy's book and made the other boy pay him 50¢ to get his book back. He's just that kind of boy. He's real sharp and he thinks about ways to get at people, you know. But he's all right, I can control him."

Teachers, as a group, identified more behavior problems than academic problems. There were no differences between elementary and secondary teachers. Both groups tended to report more behavior problems than academic. Surprisingly, experimental teachers tended to nominate more behavior problems than did control teachers (at nearly .05 level of statistical significance). The experimental teachers had worked for several months in a research program which was trying to meet the learning needs of four or five selected children in each classroom. However, when asked to name their four "problem children," these teachers picked other children, usually ones who presented behavior problems. Perhaps, since they knew the university consultant well, they felt comfortable enough to relate their real concerns.

Teachers, as a group, are evidently more concerned about behavior problems than academic problems, since they list behavior problems as their biggest problems in the classroom. In

reading the teacher descriptions of child problems, the experimenters consistently noted the teacher's concern about controlling student behavior.

This concern with control is evident in example #5 presented above. In this example, the teacher described some rather disturbing child characteristics which certainly need to be curbed, and concludes her evaluation of the child thusly, "But he's all right. I can control him." Certainly, this teacher is centrally concerned about classroom control. The following three cases also indicate teachers' need to feel that they are in control of pupils' behavior.

Case #6: "...I've waked him up several times. Quite often I let him sleep till the end of the period, because if he's quiet, I can really channel them into some sort of constructive work.... He was fairly docile at the beginning of the year but he's had a year to grow up. He has an older brother and an older sister; the sister is just fine. She's dumb as a post but not a discipline problem."

Case #7: "...and then X who is still a problem but not near the problem that he used to be. He's settled down and I don't really have near the difficulty with him...there are still things that he can't understand but when the chips are down he follows what I tell him to do."

Case #8: "...she tears down the hall, she can't read on a second or third grade level actually...but she has gotten to the point where she can sit in the classroom the whole period, which is an accomplishment, and sit in the detention hall a full hour and read and is most grateful."

In classifying the problems as academic or behavioral, the investigators noted that teachers frequently suggested that the source of the child's problem was due to a biological or maturational problem, his home background or earlier educational treatment. Rarely did teachers identify themselves, or their

instructional activities and materials, as a possible cause of the child's problem behavior. To quantify the extent to which teachers would include their own instructional behavior as a possible factor of the child's behavior, two raters read the 74 problem descriptions once again. They classified the source of children's problems according to whether it was: teacher; child can control his behavior, but won't or doesn't; child can't control his behavior (e.g., biological problem); other (e.g., home). The ratings of the two readers were almost identical.

It was found that teachers consistently suggest that the locus of the child's problem is attributable to factors other than their own classroom teaching ($p < .001$). In 70 of 74 cases the teachers saw the problem as being inherent in the student's ability, attitude or in a home life that does not support the school. The following cases are representative of how teachers saw the source of the problem.

Case #9: "X is I think mentally damaged. I deal with him in the regular classroom. There's an awful lot of background material on him. But he can't understand and he never will."

Case #10: "X is the problem that I've had. The reason that she's been so difficult with me is her attitude...I can take a lot of things from a child but I cannot tolerate that. A child with that. She has a chip on her shoulder the size of this school. She's sneaky...."

Case #11: "X was another problem. A boy whose father was sorry that he was born. His father was an alcoholic and he (the boy) has a horrible complex."

Many of the problems described by teachers were originally spawned by factors outside the classroom. Essentially, what happens outside the school cannot be altered by the teacher; however, the teacher can work out effective tactics in his own teaching behavior

and instructional activities for dealing with most student problems. The fact that Johnny cannot study at home does pose a real problem to the teacher, but it is possible to work out strategies to reduce the problem. However, the development of meaningful strategies begins when the teacher starts to ask such questions as: "What can I do to help Johnny? What assignments might capture his interest? John reads at a second-grade level in my fifth-grade class--what materials will be useful to him?

The real question is, how can we help teachers look, undefensively, at their own teaching behaviors and think about how changes in these behaviors might maximize the learning gains of their problem students. Paradoxically, the starting point is not to provide teachers with "strategies" for maximizing student gain, but rather, to talk with them about the topics that most urgently concern them.

At The University of Texas a number of procedures have been recently implemented to deal with the pre-instructional concerns of the teacher ("Should I teach? Can I control children? Will children like me?") For example, every elementary education candidate spends, at a minimum, eight hours a week for a semester as a teacher aide in an elementary classroom. Thus, before they student teach, prospective teachers have the chance to supervise and instruct children. A candidate who has questions about his teaching aptitude is urged to seek consultative interaction. Special personnel are provided to listen to and work with a candidate who seeks such help. Many instructors now devote class time to discussing the psychology of the teacher and helping students to anal[illegible] and deal with their pre-instructional concerns.

Principals working with beginning teachers could aid the professional development of these teachers by initially listening to their real concerns. These concerns are represented in the following questions: "Why does the principal come into my room? Can I send problem children to his office? When should I have the principal sit in on a parent-teacher conference? Where do I

get help with students who present severe behavior or learning problems? Am I an adequate teacher?" A teacher who dwells on these questions has little time to analyze his own teaching behavior and to plan alternative strategies for dealing with students. Teachers who know what is expected of them can spend their time trying to achieve such objectives; teachers who do not know what is expected of them spend their time worrying about what they should do.

The efforts that a principal takes in letting teachers know that he is willing to listen to their concerns, particularly their concerns about discipline problems, can pay off eventually in increased teacher effectiveness. Young teachers who receive such support will become less defensive in examining their own behavior and will become more willing to change their instructional behavior to facilitate student learning.